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ABSTRACT

This model framework consists of client-centered strategies that can help the mid-career changer explore options. The framework presented in this document integrates theoretical and practical applications and can be adapted for use by a variety of campuses to meet the needs of the campus' adult population through individual or group counseling. Separate sections of the document provide instruction and exercises devoted to each of the four basic elements of the model: (1) an exploration of personal characteristics affecting mid-career changes; (2) a self-assessment to determine personal strengths and weaknesses which impact career decisions and follow-through activities; (3) an understanding of the workplace; and (4) the development of job search skills needed by the mid-career changer. The section on exploration of personal characteristics looks at personal management skills, role identity and locus of control, self-confidence and age bias, and stress management. The section on self-assessment examines coping skills, significant life experiences, past and present lifestyles, and decision-making skills. The section on understanding the workplace discusses attitudes toward hiring a mature adult and attitudes toward supervisors and peers. The final section on job search provides exercises on writing letter of inquiry and resumes, identifying employers, handling a job interview, and organizing the job search. (78 references) (NB)

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MID-CAREER COUNSELING--A MODEL FRAMEWORK

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MID-CAREER COUNSELING--A MODEL FRAMEWORK

The Mid-Career Counseling Model Framework consists of client-centered strategies that can help the mid-career changer explore options. The framework integrates theoretical and practical applications and can be adapted to your own campus and to the needs of your adult population.

The Model

The model consists of four basic elements:

I. An exploration of personal characteristics affecting mid-career changes. These include personal management skills, roles, locus of control, self-confidence, age bias, and stress.

II. A self-assessment to determine personal strengths and weaknesses which impact career decisions and follow-through activities. These include coping skills, past and present life patterns, and decision-making skills.

III. An understanding of the workplace. This section includes attitudes of supervisors and peers, as well as attitudes of mid-career changers towards supervisors and peers.

IV. The development of job search skills needed by the mid-career changer. These include identifying employers, developing resumes, preparing for interviews, and organizing the job search.

As you review this model, consider how the model can be adapted for either an individualized or group counseling program on your campus. If you cannot adapt the entire model, select the elements most relevant for your mid-career clients.

I. EXPLORATION OF PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AFFECTING THE MID-CAREER CHANGE

Personal Management Skills

A person's personality is often described within the context of work, such as "she really knows how to make decisions and get things done," or "he's really a nice guy, but he doesn't seem to like to manage people," or, "he doesn't take too much initiative". In these examples, personality and the ability to manage certain work-related tasks are being evaluated. These same management skills can be related to how we manage ourselves during transitions. Personal management skills include initiative, as well as organizational, analytical and emotional skills.

Counselor Strategies

Mid-career changers must recognize their negative personal management patterns that have resulted in: job-related decisions that hindered career growth; personal changes, which if mid-career changers had to do again, would

be done differently; and work-related incidents that could have been handled better. By understanding negative and positive personal management skills, mid-career changers should gain a stronger sense of personal control over their lives.

1. **Personality Strengths Exercise**

This exercise requires clients to look at their personal management skills as they apply to goal setting and decision making. Work-related situations, such as choosing the first job, are used as the basis for exploring those skills. The positive and negative outcomes of the decision are examined, as well as what would be done differently, and what skills are needed.

2. **I Like Me Exercise**

A list of adjectives describing personal characteristics is given. Clients are asked to circle the characteristics which best describe themselves and those they would like to have.

PERSONALITY STRENGTHS EXERCISE

Directions: Sometimes things happen to us because we don't act or because we don't explore and prepare for alternatives. At other times, we have a clear sense of what it is we're seeking and are willing to give the necessary time and energy to reach the goal.

Although influenced by the situation, how and if we act reflect a pattern of decision making based on our personality strengths and weaknesses. To understand your personality style as it relates to decision making, please answer the following questions:

A. What are your strengths? List the major changes experienced in your life. Next to the change describe the conditions under which the change took place, your level of satisfaction with the change, who was most responsible for initiating the change, and if you had it to do again, would you make the change differently?

_____

_____

_____

_____

If you need more space, please use a separate piece of paper.

B. What are your patterns? Do you see any patterns in the way you've responded to change? If so, what are they?

_____

_____

_____

_____

C. What do you see as your strengths and weaknesses in the way you relate to change?

Strengths	Weaknesses
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

I LIKE ME EXERCISE

Direction: Personality labels such as "dynamic," "passive," "organized," and "disorganized" can reflect not only other people's value judgements but also the opinion you have of yourself. Your self-esteem and self-confidence are products of how you see yourself, how you accept yourself, and how you seek to maximize your strengths and minimize your weaknesses through your choice of jobs and careers. On the list below, circle the personality adjectives that best describe you and the characteristics you would like to describe you.

I AM...	I WANT TO BE
analytical	analytical
frank	frank
conforming	conforming
critical	critical
imaginative	imaginative
emotional	emotional
ambitious	ambitious
task oriented	task oriented
sensitive	sensitive
expressive	expressive
reserved	reserved
cooperative	cooperative
tactful	tactful
precise	precise
persistent	persistent
introverted	introverted
intuitive	intuitive
rational	rational
controlling	controlling
others:	others:
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

I LIKE MYSELF BECAUSE OF THE FOLLOWING STRENGTHS_____

_____.

I WOULD LIKE TO DEVELOP THE FOLLOWING STRENGTHS_____

_____.

Role Identity and Locus of Control

Personal characteristics that you and your client need to examine are role identity and locus of control. An individual has a variety of roles in activities, experiences, and relationships with people. Roles can be defined by the person's work, such as artist, gardener, lawyer, or can be defined by the individual's relationship to others, such as son, employee, wife. Some people will identify more strongly with certain roles than others.

Locus of control is the perception that individuals either have control over the roles they play or that someone else or fate has control. It is important to discuss role identity and locus of control with mid-career changers since these factors affect their self-confidence. Self-confidence is a necessary ingredient for being in charge of one's career.

Implications for Mid-Career Changer

Mid-career changers must believe that they are in control of their own lives and can determine their roles in order for them to make a career change decision. An awareness of their roles and knowledge of how to capitalize on them are essential to a successful career change. Strong identification with one or two roles or not being able to see themselves in a particular role can limit mid-career changers' options or hinder career/job changes. Redefining, eliminating, reconsidering old roles and developing new ones are key elements in evaluating whether or not to make a career change.

Counseling Strategies

At this point in the counseling process, the mid-career changer's awareness of his or her roles and locus of control should be examined. This examination can include one-to-one counseling sessions and written exercises completed at home. Counseling should focus on the mid-career changer's:

1. Perception of role identities and how they affect the decision to change careers. If the mid-career changer's role identification does not appear to lend itself to a decision to make changes in work roles, then you may need to reinforce a more positive role identification relating to a work environment.

2. Perception of whether locus of control is internal or external. If it is external, you may need to help mid-career changers believe it is all right to be in charge of their lives.

The following sample exercises were selected because they are brief and simple. The mid-career changer can complete them at home.

1. **Role Identification Exercise**

2. **Control Exercise**

ROLE IDENTIFICATION EXERCISE

WORKSHEET

Purpose: The purpose of this exercise is to help clients identify their main roles in life and their level of satisfaction with each one.

Directions: Identify the various roles you play at home (e.g., mother, father); at work (e.g., supervisor, colleague); in the community (e.g., fund raiser, PTA President; and socially (e.g., hostess, tennis partner). Indicate what is expected of you in each role, whether you live the role as you choose or as others expect you to, your satisfaction level, and whether the role should be kept or changed.

Role	What is expected of me in this role?	Do I live role as I choose or as others expect? My Choice	Others	Role Satisfaction Unsatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very Satisfied	Keep Role	Change Role
				1 2 3 4 5		
				1 2 3 4 5		
				1 2 3 4 5		
				1 2 3 4 5		

CONTROL EXERCISE

List five critical events/experiences and evaluate them to determine whether you are in control of your life.

Events/Experiences	People Involved	What Was Result or Effect on Life	Who Was In Control? Me	Who Was In Control? Other	Satisfaction With Role Satisfactory	Satisfaction With Role Unsatisfactory
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						

Self-Confidence and Age Bias

The realities of the work environment can affect a mid-life adult's efforts to change careers. Many of these realities are age related and affect the mid-life adult's self-confidence.

Implications for Mid-Career Changer

Too often a mid-career changer, experiencing voluntary or involuntary career change, goes through various stages of self-doubt and a reassessment of past choices and future goals. How well this transition stage of conflict and self-doubt is managed depends on the mid-life adult's ability to look at obstacles and develop positive coping skills to overcome them. It is important for the counselor to help job seekers manage age bias (their own and others) and to help mid-life adults maintain self-confidence. This can be done by assisting them to:

1. Acknowledge potential sources, both external and internal, of age-related conflict that can affect the career change.

2. Decide if that age-related conflict is real or imagined.

3. Decide whether or not the mid-career changer is self-confident by reviewing personal successes that aren't age stereotyped. (If the mid-career changer perceives the success as being age related, you will need to explore the reality of that bias.)

4. Develop positive methods of managing age bias in the career decision and career change process.

5. Develop and maintain a level of self-confidence throughout the job search.

Counseling Strategies

The following exercises can be used individually or together. The most important outcomes of these exercises are to: 1) develop self-confidence and, 2) manage age bias as an inhibiting factor in the career planning and job search processes.

1. What Age-Related Obstacles Will I Face Exercise

Clients will identify those age-related obstacles, internal and external, which they believe will influence getting the career or job they want. In a group workshop, a list of age obstacles can be compiled and explored to determine if they are real or imaginary. Then ways to overcome these obstacles can be discussed.

2. Risk Taking Exercise

This exercise's purpose is to assess the mid-career changer's risk-taking style.

3. Age and Career Skills Exercise

The client writes how he or she has improved over the years. The purpose of this exercise is to develop a greater sense of self-confidence by focusing on strengths.

AGE-RELATED OBSTACLES EXERCISE

Purpose: The purpose of this exercise is to help clients overcome perceived obstacles to career change by converting obstacles to assets.

Directions: Ask your client to answer the following questions and discuss them with you.

1. Identify obstacles to your proposed career change that are age related. Think of negative statements that you have made to yourself. (Example: Employers want young, energetic persons for this job.) For every negative statement listed, think of a positive counter statement and write it in the appropriate column. (Example: I have 30 more years of working life.)

	Negative Statement	Positive Statement
A.	_____	_____
B.	_____	_____
C.	_____	_____
D.	_____	_____
E.	_____	_____
F.	_____	_____
G.	_____	_____
H.	_____	_____
I.	_____	_____

NOTES

RISK TAKING EXERCISE

Purpose: The purpose of this exercise is to help mid-career changers assess their risk-taking style.

Directions: What risks have you taken in your life? Identify the event and what you actually risked. Circle the level of risk and whether or not you were satisfied with the results. Draw your risk profile by connecting the circles in the Level of Risk column. Now, connect circles in the Satisfaction column.

Risk-Taking Event	Risk Description	Level of Risk Low High 1 2 3 4 5	Satisfaction With Results Yes/No
		1 2 3 4 5	Yes / No
		1 2 3 4 5	Yes / No
		1 2 3 4 5	Yes / No
		1 2 3 4 5	Yes / No
		1 2 3 4 5	Yes / No

Note where Level of Risk profile line is close to Satisfaction Profile line.
Note where Level of Risk profile line and Satisfaction Profile line are far apart.
What gives you Satisfaction? High Risk Event? Low Risk Event? Any Surprises?

AGE AND CAREER SKILLS EXERCISE

Purpose: The purpose of this exercise is to help clients articulate their strengths and skills.

Directions: Too often aging is seen as a period when we lose skills rather than as a period when they are improved. Ask your clients to answer the following questions so that they will have a better idea of the strengths they can offer a potential employer.

1. What strengths and skills do you have now that you did not have when you started your career? (Example: decision making)

   A._____ F._____

   B._____ G._____

   C._____ H._____

   D._____ I._____

   E._____ J._____

2. What strengths and skills do you have that need to be improved?

   A._____ D._____

   B._____ E._____

   C._____ F._____

3. How do you perceive yourself today that is different from earlier perceptions?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

Stress Management

Stress is a reaction to changes experienced in one's personal life, career, or social relationships. Mid-career changers' beliefs about their relationship to the world, their limitations, and their lack of control over their own lives can produce tension, worry, and anxiety. Managing stress is a key factor in the successful achievement of future plans. To manage stress, changes may be necessary in self-concept, goals and objectives, and behavior in stressful situations.

Implications Mid-Career Changer

Undergoing a career or job change can be very stressful. If your clients are experiencing high levels of stress, they will need to become aware of and understand what is producing tension and anxiety. Factors might include lack of self-confidence, conflict with family, or money to return to school. Mid-life adults must reduce stress to manageable levels in order to successfully complete a career change and adjust to new responsibilities and a new work environment.

Counseling Strategies

You can do a number of things to help mid-career changers reduce stress to a more manageable level and make behavior changes which lead to productive action. Here are some specific actions or resources you can provide:

1) Support the attempt to analyze the causes of stress and to understand the situation.

2) Encourage the client to make changes in behavior (e.g., to stop procrastinating through goal-setting activities, and establish a contract for accomplishing specific activities by the next counseling session).

3) Suggest strategies for changing ways of thinking (e.g., to develop belief of being in control of career change) or changing the situational problem (e.g., to prepare a budget for financing change).

4) Suggest various stress reduction techniques and activities (e.g., physical exercises, meditation, yoga) by developing a list of community class offerings.

The Imagery Exercise

This exercise is a quick and rather simple way of reducing stress to a manageable level.

IMAGERY EXERCISE

Purpose: The purpose of this exercise is to help clients reduce stress to manageable levels by becoming relaxed and calm.

Directions: Proceed through the following mental activities with your client. With practice, a person can generally achieve a deep level of relaxation as preparation for stressful events.

1. Find a quiet place where you can relax.

   * Ease the tension from your body by breathing deeply and slowly. Breathe in deeply.....slowly exhale through your mouth. Take another long deep breath and let it out very, very slowly.

   * Imagine each part of your body becoming limp and rubbery. Feel how heavy and relaxed you are. Continue to take long deep breaths. Exhale very slowly.

   * Now, concentrate on deep breathing and slowly exhaling, with your eyes closed so that you become less aware of objects and movements around you.

2. In a state of perfect relaxation, feeling unwilling to move a single muscle, picture yourself in the stressful situation (for example a job interview).

   * You begin to feel tense.

   * Your reactions begin to develop. Tension begins to encroach.

   * Immediately, breathe in deeply--slowly exhale. Again, breathe in deeply----slowly exhale...repeat several times.

   * Tell yourself to r-e-l-a-x. Not to be anxious, to behave in a calm and deliberate manner.

3. Slowly erase from your mind the scene which caused you discomfort.

   * Breathe in deeply...slowly exhale. Feel yourself becoming heavier. Take another long deep breath and let it out very slowly. Slowly, slowly let the memory of the stressful situation fade...fade away.

   * Take another long deep breath and let it out very slowly. Feel how heavy and relaxed you are.

   * .....slowly.....deeply.....slowly.....deeply breathe.

   * Completely relax.

4. Imagine the scene several times until you really feel calm and confident about the situation.

Directions for Bringing Client Out of the Imagery Exercise:

5. Now I want you to continue feeling relaxed. Carry on with your deep breathing. (Pause).

6. Now, as you continue to feel relaxed, we will end the exercise. I am going to count backwards from four to one;

   * When I reach "one," I want you to slowly open your eyes.

   * You should then continue to feel fine and refreshed.

   * You should continue to feel wide-awake and calm.

   * Four (Pause)

   * Three (Pause)

   * Two (Pause)

   * One (Pause)

7. Just continue to sit relaxed like that. When you wish to move around, feel free to be on your own.

This weekly plan of action strategy can help your client anticipate what to expect and should prevent worry and anxiety.

II. SELF ASSESSMENT

Coping Skills

Coping skills can help an individual overcome high levels of stress. Stress can interfere with decision making and acting. Coping skills enable an individual to deal with tension, worry, and anxiety by lessening their effectiveness or by controlling them in a productive and realistic way. When coping skills are weak, self-defeating behavior patterns develop.

Implications For a Mid-Career Changer

Mid-career changers are in the process of making modifications in their lives--ones that can impact lifestyle, home life, personal relationships, and work life. To a degree, your clients are facing the unknown and can experience high levels of stress. Therefore, good coping skills are essential to enable them to make satisfactory decisions and effectively follow through on them.

Counseling Strategies

You can support your clients who are experiencing tension and anxiety to:

1) Prepare for the transition and anticipate the ways in which it might affect their lives.

2) Review their pattern of coping behavior to determine which coping skills can be used and which may have to be developed.

3) Become more task oriented and focus on developing more problem-solving skills.

The following exercises will give your clients several ways to strengthen their coping skills, depending upon the particular situation and their coping behavior patterns.

1. Analysis of Coping Skills Worksheet

This exercise can be used by a client with high tension and anxiety levels and, possibly, negative coping patterns.

2. Diary-Keeping Exercise

The purpose of this exercise is to help clients identify stress-inducing situations and to recognize physical cues and behavior patterns. Understanding and identifying STRESSORS when they are beginning is valuable information. Consequently, clients can plan what to do to relieve stress before it becomes overwhelming.

3. A Plan of Action Worksheet

COPING SKILLS WORKSHEET

Directions:

1. Select a stressful situation and write it on the line after Situation.
2. In Column One, list what disturbs you about the situation.
3. In Column Two, list nonproductive and ineffective ways you cope or react to the situation.
4. In Column Three, list examples of positive, calming, task-oriented, concrete actions.

SITUATION _____

1 Stressful Elements	2 Negative Coping Patterns	3 Positive Coping Patterns

Now when you find yourself in this stressful situation again, refer to your positive coping activity list and try to carry them out.

DIARY KEEPING EXERCISE: STRESSFUL EVENTS

Directions: Keep a daily diary of stressful career change events. The following format can be used at the end of each day. Begin by writing the date and time the event occurred.

Date:_____ Time:_____

Describe Stressful Event using the questions of a storyteller.

1. How did it begin?

2. What problems arose?

3. In what part of my body did I feel the stress?

4. What were my thoughts and feelings?

5. How were they handled? What did I do?

6. How did it all turn out?

7. What do I think about it now (in the evening)?

Further Directions: Review your notes once a week to look for behavior patterns, to recognize the part of your body where you feel the stress, and to think about possible alternatives.

Discuss your stressors and reactions with your counselor, a friend, or members of your self-help group, if you feel this would be helpful.

PLAN OF ACTION WORKSHEET

Weekly Plan of Action

Week Of:_____

Complete the following items:

1. Objective - State what you want to accomplish during this week towards achieving your career change.

2. Tasks that need to be done to accomplish objective. Rank the tasks.

3. Information needed and sources of information (e.g., resume writing - career services office).

4. People that need to be contacted (e.g., faculty advisor, director of local professional organization).

5. Timetable for plans (include deadline date for each task).

6. Obstacles/barriers to accomplishing objectives (e.g., family obligations, never wrote a resume).

7. Daily checkpoint for evaluating progress. Look at percentage of tasks completed, review what is still left to do.

8. Other life activities that may need to be eliminated, reduced, or postponed for objective to be accomplished (e.g., not attending meetings, cutting back on an activity).

Significant Life Experiences: Accomplishments/Achievements

Mid-career adults need to explore life patterns that influence their ability to manage transitions. Life patterns that should be examined are the accomplishments and achievements valued by the individual.

Accomplishments and achievements are frequently related to: 1) skills that we're good at and like using, 2) situations that allow us to grow professionally and/or personally, and 3) environments that we find enjoyable.

When life experiences are examined, similarities become apparent, such as the rewards earned, the people and/or work situation in which the achievement took place, and the skills used.

Implications for Mid-Career Changer

Mid-career changers often feel a need to change their present occupations or life styles due to growing dissatisfaction with an existing situation. Instead of building upon previous choices, values, and/or skills, mid-career adults may reject them. Through careful evaluation, mid-career changers need to make occupational choices that reflect what is meaningful to them.

Counseling Strategies

Counselors should help mid-career changers assess their significant life experiences for interests, skills, and values. These factors are useful in developing new career goals and providing information about achievement patterns.

In a one-to-one counseling session, the mid-career changer should identify significant life achievements for each major chronological age period: 15-20, 20-30, 30-40, and 40-50. You can list skills, interests, and rewards that the mid-career changer feels were an important part of the achievement. Then compare skills, interests, and rewards in each achievement for similarities and differences.

The mid-career changer can prepare for this activity by completing the life achievements and accomplishments worksheet which follows. The data can then be used to focus in on the achievement. This exercise can also be adapted for a group.

LIFE ACHIEVEMENTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS EXERCISE

Purpose: The purpose of this exercise is to help clients identify their major life accomplishments and the skills used to achieve them.

Directions: Ask your client to list accomplishments under each age category and indicate skills used, reasons for activity, rewards expected, and personal qualities needed to accomplish tasks.

	WORK	PERSONAL	SOCIAL
Teens			
20's			
30's			
40's			
50's			

Past and Present Lifestyles

Attitudes, values, and lifestyle preferences are important factors in any career decision. They are an integral part of personality and the foundation for an individual's motivation. They also can be a strong determinant for establishing specific career goals.

A necessary part of self-assessment is the inventory and clarification of values. Values are those things an individual believes in or cherishes, and they influence actions, relationships, and goals. Values can change as an individual ages.

Lifestyle is a reflection of values. It is the sum total of the way we live our lives: housing, style of dress, social life, recreation, and education. Attitudes towards jobs and work environments are influenced by our values and desired lifestyle.

Implications for the Mid-Career Changer

Mid-career changers are likely to re-examine their present life structure and values. This includes if and how their values have changed, satisfaction with their lifestyle, and attitude towards their present work.

Examining what will motivate your client in terms of an ideal work situation is essential for making a satisfying career decision. Mid-career changers are usually settled into a lifestyle with family responsibilities. In reassessing and ranking personal and work values, they must acknowledge that a career/job change may affect their present lifestyles. It is through this review that clients can either commit to the change or reaffirm their present life structure and beliefs.

Counseling Strategies

During the reassessment period you can help your client to:

1) Analyze present attitudes, values, and lifestyles.

2) Become aware of and understand any changes that may have occurred in the last few years.

3) Set goals for the future.

4) Consider involvement in new activities that affirm values and desired lifestyle.

5) Consider the type of organizational environment which might be a "good fit" for the ideal life structure.

There are many different attitude, values, and lifestyle exercises, inventories, and checklists. Appropriate ones for mid-career changers take into account the life experiences of mature adults. Characteristics of such materials include:

1) Autobiographical exercises that examine highlights, feelings, varied experiences, influential people, and life patterns.

2) Value exercises that are situational rather than checklists and include ranking directions.

3) Past, present, and future exercises that include a listing of values, needs, decisions, attitudes, and goals.

4) Materials that focus on an examination of career, family, community, and personal activities rather than on school, extracurricular activities, and hobbies.

5) Materials that allow an individual to complete sentences, write paragraphs, or fill in blanks rather than checking off a list.

In general, exercises or materials should examine, analyze, and help clarify, in addition to identifying, listing, and ranking. They should allow individuals to look at all important aspects of their lives and be flexible enough to include the varied experiences of mature adults.

The following exercise, What Does Career Change Mean to You?, will help clarify the mid-career changer's attitudes.

WHAT DOES CAREER CHANGE MEAN TO YOU?

Purpose: This stem completion exercise is a first step toward getting at the underlying causes of your career-change attitudes. Your responses can be used as a basis for small-group discussion, with your counselor or with your spouse or friend.

Directions: Complete the following sentences in the space provided. Work quickly. Do not labor over your answers but jot down the first thing that comes to mind.

1. As a child, my dream was to be a:

2. When asked what my work is I say:

3. My first awareness that I wanted a career change came when:

4. Seeing other people get ahead has:

5. The most important thing I do is:

6. My mid-career change will be threatening to:

7. Physical changes I've noticed are:

8. One way I hope to grow is:

9. Mid-life has expanded my ideas about:

Decision-Making Skills

One of the most critical skills needed to successfully manage a career change is decision making. The ability to cope, reduce stress and anxiety, and be in control of one's life is related to different levels of decision making. Some people have stronger decision-making skills than others. They are able to look at alternatives, choose the most meaningful, and act. Others, regardless of the decision-making approach, are indecisive, or inactive in the decision-making process.

Implications for Career Changer

In working with a mid-career changer, the counselor should be aware of the client's ability to make decisions. Clients may need to develop strong decision-making skills compatible with their personality strengths and style. (See counseling strategies.)

Decision-making skills are important for mid-career changers who voluntarily or involuntarily change careers. Although people might recognize their dissatisfaction without these skills, they would be unable to identify alternatives and work towards them.

The basis of controlling one's life is the ability to make relevant decisions. A mid-career adult may have a work history of reacting to available options rather than reaching career goals. For them to make and carry out career plans, they need to: 1) assess their decision-making skills, 2) identify ways to improve them, and 3) practice strong decision-making skills.

Counseling Strategies

To assist a client in developing strong decision-making skills, a counselor needs to:

1) Identify level of readiness to make a decision. Often the individual is in the process of thinking about making a decision as opposed to making one. For some people, this "thinking process" may take one or two years.

2) Assess decision-making patterns. What method has been used? Is there satisfaction with this approach? If not, why?

3) Explore various decision-making skill exercises which can help the client focus on realistic alternatives and weigh them against personal and career goals. This process can result in committing time and energy to reaching career goals.

The decision-making skills exercise that follows is designed to help mid-career changers make appropriate decisions by determining the degree of consistency among their skills, goals, and values. This exercise is effective after self-assessment exercises have been completed.

DECISION-MAKING SKILLS EXERCISE

Directions: You are considering a mid-career change. List the career and your skills, goals, and values. Fill out a separate form for each career option.

****

CAREER OPTION: _____

SKILLS: This option builds on my primary skills of:
(List in order of strength)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

GOALS: This option meets my absolute goals or requirements of:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

VALUES: This option is in line with my values of:
(List in order of importance)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

III. UNDERSTANDING THE WORKPLACE

Attitudes Towards Hiring a Mature Adult

Although more mature adults are entering second careers today, their job entry may not be accomplished easily. The mid-career changer must be personally and technically prepared for a career change and also be aware of biases for and against employing mature persons.

In many large organizations careers follow traditional paths. When a career development plateau is reached, the individual is content to remain in the same position in order to be eligible for accumulated financial and in-kind benefits. Although this is beginning to change, some employers are biased against employing the mature adult. The bias may be based on personal feelings, including skepticism toward a person who rejects traditionally held work values, questions about whether older adults can relate to younger supervisors and coworkers, and most importantly whether the mature adult will fit into the organization.

Implications for Mid-Career Changer

Techniques for overcoming employer biases should be part of the mid-career change strategy. Some questions employers ask may represent hidden biases:

1) What are your reasons for making a career change at your age?

2) Why are you willing to accept a financial loss?

3) If you are so interested in this field, why have you stayed so long in your previous career?

4) How do you feel about being managed by a younger person?

Knowing that these questions might be asked will help the mid-career changers to prepare answers.

Counseling Strategies

The career counselor should encourage the mid-career changer to explore company hiring and promotional policies which might translate into age biases. Methods of obtaining information include:

1) Meeting with employers, friends,and professional colleagues to get general information related to change. The mid-career changer can invite the person for coffee or lunch so that information is shared in a relaxed environment. Types of information to extract are: financial constraints that mid-level career changers may confront, hiring and promotion practices of the organization, and backgrounds and occupational preparation of employees.

2) Identifying companies most likely to hire mid-career changers in a particular field and the reasons why they prefer mid-career adults to the traditional entry-level person.

3) Identifying personal/career liabilities. The mid-career changer can list personal/professional liabilities that might inhibit reaching career objectives. Realistic, alternative objectives should also be identified.

Attitudes Towards Supervisor and Peers

Positive attitudes towards one's supervisor and fellow workers are important to be successful and satisfied in a job. Also, a supervisor's view of an employee is partially formed by the person's reactions to suggestions, orders, and recommendations.

Implications for Mid-Career Changer

When mid-career changers begin new jobs, the supervisors and peers play a critical role in their quick and effective integration into the work environment. Negative attitudes toward a younger supervisor or a female supervisor can inhibit mid-career changers from learning the new work roles and responsibilities.

Mid-career changers need to be aware of any changes in their self-concept, which may result from being in a job with less power, authority, and prestige among coworkers than they had previously. These changes can lead to negative feelings towards peers. Mid-career changers may also need to adapt to a younger peer group. Their ability to communicate with younger coworkers is important to their acceptance into both formal and informal work relationships, such as coffee breaks, luncheon dates, and after-work drinks. Taking the initiative in developing relationships with supervisors and peers can lead to acceptance by the work group and, therefore, an easier adjustment to the new work environment.

Counseling Strategies

Before your clients report to a new job, help them understand their attitudes toward their new supervisors and peers. Negative attitudes can inhibit successful on-the-job training and integration into the new work setting. You may need to counsel clients regarding attitudes after they have been hired for a position, met their supervisor and possibly some co-workers, but have not started the job.

1. Previewing Exercise

The purpose of previewing is to have the client become aware of feelings, opinions, and possible behavioral outcomes. Mid-career changers can simulate meeting and working with their new supervisors and peer groups and think through possible reactions and responses to accepting a job that may challenge their self-esteem. For example, you may want to suggest to your clients that they preview the first time they are trained by their supervisor or coworker,

so they understand their own opinions, fears, problems, and possible reactions.

2. Role-Playing Exercise

Role play the first day on the job, particularly interactions with the new supervisor and coworkers. Clients should describe their new supervisor (assuming they met during the selection process) and give their impressions of their coworkers. You can take the role of the supervisor or peer. During the role play, focus on the mid-career changer's reactions to the supervisor or coworkers that reflect attitudes. If this is a group counseling situation, another group member can role play the person at work.

IV. JOB SEARCH

Resumes and Letters of Inquiry/Communication

A resume is a primary tool for contacting potential employers. It can also be used in networking and it serves a similar purpose as a business card. A cover letter accompanies a resume submitted to an organization for a specific job opening, while a letter of inquiry is a synopsis of a resume sent to an organization to learn if there are any appropriate job openings.

Implications for Mid-Career Changer

Several points need to be highlighted regarding the development and use of a resume. These include:

1) A functional or functional/chronological format can be used rather than just a chronological one. Information can be arranged in order of importance, relevant job titles can be emphasized, and dates can be inconspicuous or omitted.

2) Content should emphasize skills, abilities, experience, and education appropriate to the new career.

3) Refresher courses, CEU's, and relevant community experience are highlighted.

4) Transferable skills/abilities are easily identified and include specific work accomplishments.

5) Age references are omitted.

6) Several versions of resumes and letters of inquiry are developed for different jobs.

7) A modified cover letter/letter of inquiry is used which: a) should not be apologetic for re-entry or career change, b) is directed to the specific organization's needs, and c) communicates willingness to enter a new career or change jobs.

8) A resume can be given out through networking and other informal channels of conducting a job search, such as social, community, and church groups.

A mid-career changer's dialogue when giving out a resume should not be self-directing. "I'm looking for a job although I have been out of the job market for 15 years," or "I'm looking to get into _____ field, but I'm not sure in what capacity," are samples of such statements. When a contact is made and a resume given, it may be more appropriate for a mid-career changer to suggest meeting at a later date. The resource person will then have an opportunity to review the resume.

Counseling Strategies

Mid-career changers have many worthwhile and relevant skills and experiences to include in a resume. A mid-career changer may need help in:

1) identifying transferable skills/abilities,

2) organizing these skills/abilities into cluster areas of competency or expertise, with examples of accomplishments,

3) keeping the resume short (especially for a client with an extensive background and achievements), and

4) eliminating any apologetic or self-defeating references in the cover letter or letter of inquiry.

For a mid-career changer with considerable high-level volunteer experiences and/or transferable skills and abilities, it may be appropriate to put together a "professional packet" consisting of work samples, examples of accomplishments such as grant proposals, programs developed, newsletters, and recognition certificates for volunteer services.

You may also need to provide assistance on how to target resumes and letters of inquiry to specific employers by rearranging and highlighting information to meet a particular need.

The following exercise will help mid-career changers learn how to target their resumes and cover letters to fit a specific position and employer.

FOCUSING RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS/LETTERS OF INQUIRY EXERCISE

Have a mid-career changer select two potential employers. They should include different types of organizations, such as a professional association and a service product company. The mid-career changer should seek two different positions, such as newsletter editor and assistant director of publicity. Resumes and cover letters/letters of inquiry should be developed for these two possible employers, then reviewed and evaluated in a follow-up session.

This exercise can help mid-career changers direct their thinking toward the needs of prospective employers and gain experience in editing their resumes to fit the particular employer and position.

Identify Employers

A person seeking a job should identify possible employers and gather information about them. This information should be practical, specific, and include regional and local job information.

Implications For Mid-Career Changer

Mid-career changers may feel "out of touch" with the job market and at a loss on how to begin a job campaign. For the person seeking a new career, old contacts and resources may not be relevant.

The mid-career changer needs to know how to: 1) identify information sources about local, regional, and national employers; 2) use those sources to locate potential job opportunities; and 3) identify an operating unit and a key person within the unit to contact for job information.

Counseling Strategies

The career development center can develop a directory of suggested ways of locating potential organizations, resources, and contacts. The traditional approaches for identiifying employers should include:

1) the college placement service,

2) faculty members,

3) employment agencies, executive search agencies, management consulting firms,

4) newspaper want ads, and

5) state employment agency and US OPM regional office.

Research resources and references can include:

1) directories and other materials in your own career library,

2) lists of standard, trade, industrial, and regional publications in schools or local public library, and

3) the Yellow Pages.

Since a mid-career changer should emphasize past experiences and skills in seeking a new position, additional sources and suggestions for inclusion in the directory are:

1) professional or trade association membership (utilizing their placement services, newsletters, networking groups),

2) other networking groups located through the newspapers, placement office, alumni office, women's centers, and magazines,

3) Forty-Plus groups or other similar self-help/job club groups,

4) job change support groups sponsored by community/church groups,

5) government agency job postings,

6) want ads in professional journals, trade magazines, and newsletters,

7) temporary agencies (try out the field, gain experience, research organizations), and

8) field research of an industry/organization.

Networking is another relevant way for a mid-career changer to identify employers. A network is a group of people, informal or formal, who have a common interest in or are engaged in similar activities. It is important that mid-career changers:

1) identify specific goals that they want to accomplish through networking, such as to gather information or locate potential employers,

2) identify appropriate network sources,

3) identify and contact members of the network group who are likely to be of assistance,

4) become visible in the network so that interests, abilities, and experiences can become known and called upon or recommended to others, e.g., serving on committees or presenting, and

5) follow up on leads.

The following exercise will help mid-career changers develop a list of organizations to contact.

DEVELOPING ORGANIZATIONAL TARGETS EXERCISE

Have mid-career changers, either individually or in groups:

1) develop guidelines for compiling a list of employer information resources that would be most meaningful, e.g., career, geographical area, type of organization interests, and

2) compile a list of organization and individual targets using the directory developed by your office.

Job Interview/General Communication Skills

In any job search the interview becomes a crucial determinant of whether a qualified candidate is offered a position. Much has been written about how to interview successfully, including verbal and nonverbal skills. Job seekers must communicate to an employer their interest and enthusiasm for a job as well as their ability to accomplish a job's tasks or assignments. Mid-career changers frequently must seek to overcome personal anxieties, patterns of poor communication, and employer biases during the interview process.

Implications for Mid-Career Changer

Mid-career changers must evaluate their interviewing skills and develop techniques for improving them. Some factors to consider when evaluating a mid-career changer's interviewing skills are:

1) The length of time since the last interview. The mid-career changer should understand and appreciate the unique role of asking for a job as opposed to interviewing a person for a job.

2) The level of data preparation. Is the mid-career changer prepared to answer difficult organizational, technical, and personal questions? How much research has gone into the job interview?

3) How confident is the mid-career changer in his or her ability to adjust to a new career and new work environment?

Counseling Strategies

Your counseling strategies should combine traditional interviewing skills workshops with specific information and training for a mid-career changer.

In preparing for the job interview, mid-career changers should be self-confident and positive in explaining:

1) The reasons for changing careers.

2) The applicability of their background and skills to the new career goal.

3) Their enthusiasm for the particular organization and a realistic understanding of potential obstacles and ways of overcoming them. Obstacles would include employer and worker biases.

You can assist the mid-career changer in preparing for a job interview by:

1) Identifying personal and professional characteristics that reinforce self-esteem.

2) Identifying communication skills that are inappropriate.

3) Anticipating employer biases and developing positive and enthusiastic responses to questions related to age.

As a counselor you should be able to provide feedback to the mid-career changer. Two methods are 1) role playing, and 2) self reporting of an interview which the mid-career changer has recently had. Interview training should be conducted in a supportive, nonthreatening environment.

Organizing the Job Search

Organizing the job search involves those tasks which make up each stage of the job-search process -- from targeting a job goal to getting the job. It requires a commitment to reaching a job goal that is both logical and realistic, given the interests and skills of the job seeker and the dynamics of the job market. It also involves a degree of flexibility to respond to current job market conditions.

The major stages of the job search are: 1) preparing job-search materials and responses -- the technical process; 2) developing short- and long-term job-search strategies, and 3) implementing the plan.

Implications for Mid-Career Changer

A person who has several years of work experience needs to apply the same systematic approach to job hunting as a person with no experience. The critical differences, though, involve the identification and ranking of personal and job-seeking tasks and the specific strategy which is developed to reach the job-search goals.

The mid-career changer will frequently see the job search as a lot riskier than a person seeking an entry-level position. At stake are basic considerations of financial security and the more individual concerns such as family security and ego. If the mid-career changer is currently employed, there is also the risk of having the present employer learn about the job search.

Counseling Strategies

You should work with the mid-career changer to assess the specific job-search tasks having the greatest impact on reaching the job goal. Then those tasks can be organized into activities which the mid-career changer can accomplish with a realistic commitment of time and energy.

Specific strategies might include:

1. **Personal Readiness Inventory.** The inventory includes financial and material resources that could be used in the job search. Major categories of resources are:

   a) financial,

b) technical materials such as resumes, past jobs, etc.;

c) skills, such as interviewing, record keeping, and organizational;

d) contacts--professional, personal, and organizational, and

e) personal items for the job search such as wardrobe.

A worksheet follows this section.

2. **Resources Identified**. Mid-career changers identify the specific organizations and key people they want to contact, what they intend to gain from the contact, and alternate contacts. Specific information may include:

   a) hard data--occupation information trends/needs/issues.

   b) organizational data--structure/size/productivity performance/employee benefits, opportunities for promotion, education, resources requiring geographic moves.

3. **Plan of Action Guide**. You can help the mid-career changer develop a short- and long-term plan of action using the different sheets headed: monthly, weekly, and daily. The plan of action should be translated into goal statements and should be reviewed on a regular basis.

4. **Recordkeeping**. Keeping regular records of occupational information, contacts, and outcome of contacts is important. This data should then be integrated into a revised plan of action sheet. Recorded information can include: contacts, date of contact, where contact was made, where contact works, referrals made by contact, suggestions made by contact, and follow-up activities.

PERSONAL READINESS INVENTORY EXERCISE

Purpose: The purpose of this exercise is to help the mid-career changer identify the financial and material resources required for a job search.

Directions: Using the space provided below, list the resources that you believe will be required for your job search.

1. Financial Resources

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Technical Materials

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Skills

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Personal, Professional, and Organizational Contacts

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. Personal Items (wardrobe, briefcase, resume)

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